



'London Calling'

Madison House directors recount their continuing love affair with Semester in London - and each other

Have you ever wondered where to find love at JMU? You're not alone. While some people prefer to cruise D-hall, peruse the Carrier stacks or scan the rows of lecture halls to find their soul mates, Jon and Gina Glassman opted for a less tactical approach. They decided to leave love to fate.

In January 1993, Jon and Gina transferred from their respective universities to JMU. The two sophomores completed their first semester at JMU without ever meeting each other, even though the transfers each declared English as their major and lived in adjacent residence halls - Jon in Gifford and Gina in Converse. It was not until they applied to and were accepted in the Semester in London Program that fate began its work.

"Gina does remember seeing me during one of the SIL orientation meetings," says Jon. "Unfortunately, my mind was adrift with visions of bitters and stouts, and I failed to look out from under the brim of my JMU cap to see her. As it turns out, we did have a few mutual friends. In fact, my roommate was at Gina's 21st birthday party the previous semester."

Gina immediately immersed herself in the London social scene. She was named social director and was thus responsible for gathering a committee to help generate ideas and plan group events and activities. Jon joined the committee. As the semester progressed, Jon and Gina became good friends, but kept their relationship strictly platonic. "Nothing romantic occurred until the Halloween party we had with some of the JMU interns," Jon recounts. "Gossip spreads quickly in the Madison House, so we had a clandestine relationship for a few weeks until we were 'found out' by one of the resident managers, Harry Atwood. I remember him saying something like, 'So the rumors are true.'"

After the SIL program, Jon and Gina spent a week traveling together, but soon after parted ways - Gina to Northern Virginia and Jon to Connecticut - to spend the holidays with their families. The two kept in touch via telephone over the break, and Jon cut his stay in Connecticut short in order to spend a few days with Gina before classes resumed. "I actually stayed with another friend from JMU, but I met Gina's family while I was in town," he says. "I was scared when I walked up to her house. Gina has a big family and I was about to meet them all. Much to my relief they were delightful. I had a very warm welcome and felt well enough to keep my dinner down."

In May 1995, Gina graduated from JMU and moved to Northern Virginia. Because Jon would not graduate until the following December, the two agreed to alternate weekends between Harrisonburg and Northern Virginia. Upon his graduation, Jon got a job and moved close to Gina. Before they knew it, the two had been together for three and a half years.

"On a cool May weekend on top of Mary's Rock in the Shenandoah National Park, I proposed to Gina. After she accepted," he says with a mock "whew," "I whisked her off to the Inn at Keezletown road for a romantic weekend. On Halloween day, exactly four years after our first date, we were married under

a beautiful blue sky at Hollin Hall Manor in Mount Vernon.

Not long after Jon and Gina had said their "I-Dos," Harry and Robin Atwood, resident managers of the Madison House, announced that they were retiring from the London Program. The Atwoods, in need of successors, immediately thought of Jon and Gina and promised to recommend the newlyweds for the position. "Like most students who pass through Madison House, we were definitely interested in the job," says Jon. "By this time we were both entrenched in our work life. Gina was a high school English teacher in Fairfax County, while I worked in the marketing department for NASDAQ. Although we both liked what we were doing, we decided that a change would be good for us so we applied for the position."

The Glassmans were offered the position in March of 2000. Eight weeks later they arrived in London to take over as the new resident managers of Madison House.

"Living and working in Madison House has been an adventure," says Jon. "We have had a great opportunity to meet many JMU students, faculty and alumni. My favorite part of the job is watching students grow in knowledge, wisdom and independence during their time in London. For many, London is the first step into a life of world travel and personal fulfillment."

Katie Templin ('03)